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Sounds of Silence: The Unspoken Voices in Four Spanish and German Post-War Texts

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Abstract

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This honors thesis examines the use of silence in texts (literature and film) about the Spanish Civil War and the Holocaust. My thesis aims to demonstrate that rather than an absence, silence is chosen by writers and directors consciously, as a powerful tool used to communicate trauma. Each chapter explores various manifestations of silence as seen in the following four examples: “Explico algunas cosas” (“I Explain Some Things”) by Pablo Neruda, “Todesfuge” (“Deathfuge”) by Paul Celan, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*), directed by Víctor Erice. These diverse sources provide a cross-cultural examination of the use of silence in response to the horrors of war (the Holocaust and the Spanish Civil War). Additionally, my sources span several decades between their publication dates and each war.

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A Note on Translations and Translators

Before I begin my thesis, I would like to address my use of translations throughout. Due to the fact that my thesis focuses on texts from three different languages (Spanish, German and Yiddish), English translations of primary sources played an active role in my attaining a deeper understanding and analyzing of the texts examined in my chapters. To the best of my ability, I maintained the integrity of the originals by both reading them multiple times (with the exception of the Yiddish), and by citing them throughout my thesis.

Additionally, I would like to address the question of the translators for each of these texts. All of my primary sources were written in different languages, and with the exception of Víctor Érice's film *El espíritu de la colmena*, I used one English translation for each. For the poem "Explico algunas cosas" by Pablo Neruda, I used Mark Eisner's translation; for Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge", John Felstiner's translation; finally, I used Marion Wiesel's English translation of Elie Wiesel's *Night*. However, as the original version of *Night* was written in Yiddish, Professor Nick Block of Emory University kindly translated the original Yiddish into a rough English translation, so that I could understand and cite it in my thesis.

Many of my secondary sources required translations as well, as they were written in languages congruent to my primary sources. Thus, I also provided and cited the English translations of quotations used. Many of these were translations from the same secondary source author. However, in some cases, sources did not offer translations. In these instances, I either translated the quotes myself or provided translations from secondary authors; both circumstances are noted in the body and Works Cited page of my thesis.

Introduction

Silence, defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the “absence of sound or noise” (“Silence”), plays a prevalent part in contemporary and historical literature, as a literary device used to aid an argument or purpose. Counterintuitive to its definition, silence used in writing often does not represent an absence or negative; rather, it is used as a way to construct and frame literature. Furthermore, in contrast to research that claims the ineffability of trauma, I examine silence as a means of communication. Although prominent scholar Elaine Scarry argues, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate recession to a state anterior to language...” (4), I argue that traumatic events can be portrayed through the use of silence. While recognizing the inadequacy of language to fully convey trauma, I maintain that it is not inexpressible and explore the various ways in which silence communicates.

Additionally, I argue that silence as a response to large-scale atrocities such as the Spanish Civil War and the Holocaust can be seen as twofold. First, victims of these events remained silent because they suffered from oppression and were unable to freely speak out; their voices and opinions were not only smothered but also punishable by death. Secondly, words were often an ineffective way to convey the horrors experienced and witnessed by the victims. In the aftermath of the wars, the events were largely seen as so “unspeakable” that their response was the use of silence. The aim of my thesis, however, is to re-analyze the use of silence, interpreting it as a consciously chosen coping mechanism instead of an imposed form of repression, in the face of traumatic experiences. I argue that throughout various genres, victims of trauma use silence as an act to symbolize their choice, freedom, and/or power in

seemingly hopeless situations. I will be closely studying the works of Pablo Neruda, Elie Wiesel, Víctor Érice, and Paul Celan to prove that silence is not merely the absence of words but rather a metonym evoked not as a *lack* of expression but rather in order *to* express the horror, pain and destruction wrought by large-scale trauma.

To introduce the concept of “silence” with respect to my research, let us examine the poem “Schweigen” (“Silence”), written by Eugen Gomringer in 1954. This poem epitomizes the use of silence as a construct, a concrete presence which aids in the creation of the poem and its meaning. “Schweigen” creates a visual representation of silence, proving that it is not an absence, but rather an obvious and essential presence:

schweigen schweigen schweigen
 schweigen schweigen schweigen
 schweigen schweigen
 schweigen schweigen schweigen
 schweigen schweigen schweigen

The word *schweigen* is German for *silence*, and although Gomringer comprises nearly all of the poem by repeating the word “schweigen”, the most prominent aspect of this poem is the wordless void in the center. This poem visually illustrates that one way to understand silence is not through its denotation but through the positive presence of silence, which makes the void more meaningful and stronger than words. As I will demonstrate, silence can also be used meaningfully in other parallel ways.

How do writers and artists begin to translate experiences, and more specifically, trauma? My response is that one important way is through the constructed use of silence, and to demonstrate this, I will focus on two poems, a biographically influenced film, and a memoir. It seemed significant to me to use two works from the time after the Spanish Civil War (Francoist Spain) and two from after the Holocaust, in order to examine the breadth and diversity of silence as a literary device and compare said works between country and time period. I chose the following examples on which to focus my work: the poem “Explico algunas cosas” (“I Explain Some Things”) (1936) by Chilean Pablo Neruda, the poem “Todesfuge” (“Death Fugue”) (1945) by German writer and translator Paul Celan, the memoir *Un di velt hot geshvign* (1954) (*Night*) (2006) by the Romanian-born Elie Wiesel, and the film *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) (1973) by Spanish director Víctor Érice. Throughout my thesis, I will examine the differences in how silence is manifested in each of these works, and how the multidimensionality of silence demonstrated throughout contributes to the artists’ expression of power, hope and/or freedom.

With respect to my selection of sources, I deliberately chose a diverse range of genres, and I was intentional in my inclusion of two sources from post-war Spain and two sources from after the Holocaust. Throughout my analysis, John Felstiner, American literary critic, translator and poet, played an important role in centralizing my argument, as his research and publications on both Pablo Neruda and Paul Celan aided me in making cross-cultural connections. Furthermore, his analysis of each author and their works assisted my understanding of both how the wars impacted the authors’ lives and the poems themselves. I selected poems because poetry serves as a very poignant point of contrast to lengthier works,

since it crystallizes great ideas into little space and few words. In regard to the selection of my second primary sources from both Germany and Spain, I wanted to work with two memoirs (again, one from each country and time period); and in the context of Spain, I found the best such document in the form of a film that recounts many of the director's biographical experiences of Francoism. This selection of sources has proven very valuable in my research because a cross-genre comparison lends itself to a broader examination of how victims use silence to interpret and translate trauma.

In my first chapter, I will argue that Pablo Neruda conveys the inability of words to explain the Spanish Civil War and its impact on his life and writing in his poem "Explico algunas cosas." Instead, he uses a lack of words, suggesting silence to present to his readers the aftermath of all that he witnesses around him. In the poem, Neruda calls out to friends who used their voices as weapons against Franco and his regime during the war, and who as a result were punished by death. He speaks on their behalf and I will argue that he chooses to use silence as his own tool to express his grief and convey not only a tragedy that is both personal and national. I will argue that Neruda's poem demonstrates the use of self-imposed silence to overcome the violent censorship of Franco's regime.

My second chapter will focus on Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge." Similar to Neruda's "Explico algunas cosas," Celan's use of repetition conveys the idea that the choice of words to portray trauma and pain is limited. However, in contrast to Neruda, it is unclear whether the speaker in "Todesfuge" is Celan himself. Throughout the poem, it appears that the speaker switches from being a third-party observer to a group of Holocaust prisoners. Both narrators observe or experience, but neither offers opinions, instead remaining silent and seeming

unaffected by the violent actions of the poem's protagonist, a German Nazi. Rather, the victims in this poem, though forced to dance and dig their own graves for the entertainment and delight of their guard, maintain control over themselves. Celan portrays this sense of power through the self-determined silence of the prisoners, which represents the one choice they have the freedom to make.

Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* will serve as the focus of my third chapter. This short book exemplifies perhaps different dimensions of silence in portraying trauma, implying that the translation of trauma into words is almost impossible. Wiesel prefaces his book with a justification for a new English translation. He explains his appreciation for the newest version, translated by his wife, stating that it provides a more accurate rendition of his original memoir. However, Wiesel also admits his uncertainty as regards any written translation of trauma because while he wanted to provide the most accurate recount of his experience, he experienced difficulties depicting such trauma even in his native language. As a way to put ideas into literature, he uses silence to capture what he cannot write with words. I will argue that Wiesel and Neruda use silence as a tool similarly; however, Wiesel describes not only the silence enforced by the Nazi regime but also the silence that comes with giving up hope. As a response, the idea of silence in his memoir stands for pain and fear, and also sad realization and acceptance of a sick, cruel reality.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I will focus on the Spanish film, *El espíritu de la colmena* directed by Víctor Erice. In this chapter, I focus on opposing forms of silence: self-imposed silence versus the enforced silence of Franco's regime in Spain. This silence is seen in multiple ways throughout the film. Firstly, I present ways in which the movie alludes to the censorship of

the period, seen in the censored presentation of *Frankenstein*, a film within the film.

Additionally, I argue that the way in which Érice produces and edits the film serves as a silent criticism of life under Franco. While the characters of the film appear to demonstrate submission to Franco's rule, I argue that Érice's depiction of post-war Spanish life through silence symbolizes hope for the future of Spain. Through his silent criticism, arguably, Érice conveys the horrific cultural destruction of Spain as a result of the war and Franco's dictatorship, and from the criticism comes hope for change.

To conclude my thesis, I will examine the way in which these texts compare with each other. Although each uses different silence to convey trauma in different ways, the variation of genres, time periods, medias, and traumatic events discussed in my chapters proves the important role of multidimensional silence in the effort to express trauma and horror in literature.

Chapter One

Come and See the Silence in Pablo Neruda's "Explico algunas cosas"

With language inherently comes silence, and with silence comes the ability to translate trauma. In this chapter, I will argue that Pablo Neruda, a Chilean poet who lived from 1904 to 1973, demonstrates the positive presence of silence in his 1936 poem "Explico algunas cosas" ("I Explain Some Things"). In response to the significant emotional trauma he suffered during the time of the Spanish Civil War, Neruda reclaims silence as an expression of power in order to provide a sincere recount of the evils and brutality. We see silence in the way Neruda explains the drastic differences between wartime and post-war poetry and addresses his need to confront the impact the war had on his life and poetry. Additionally, silence is reflected in the omission of detail and the stylistic construction of the poem, which creates visual gaps suggestive of silence.

Pablo Neruda and the War

Neruda started writing poetry at a young age, publishing his first work at the age of thirteen. Although his father discouraged his literary pursuits, he continued to write, publish, and participate in poetry competitions throughout his adolescence. At the age of sixteen, he attended the Universidad de Chile, and while he originally sought to pursue a teaching degree, he instead devoted most of his time to writing. He published many works during this time, including his famous *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*), and quickly established an international reputation for himself. Because

of the strong influence Spain and France had on poetry during the early 1920s, Neruda felt compelled to travel abroad and expand his artistic knowledge (Neruda 64).

Later, in 1927, upon receiving a consulship in Rangoon, Burma, Neruda was finally able to leave Chile to pursue his passion and absorb himself in various artistic cultures worldwide. His diplomacy allowed him to travel for some time, returning to Chile for a few years, where he continued to write poems, frequently about love and passion, but he ultimately returned to Europe through his career in consulship. He had originally been placed in Barcelona; however, his employer, recognizing his poetic talent and aptitude, encouraged him to move to Madrid, the hub of Spanish poetry, and “a los pocos días [era] uno más entre los poetas españoles” (Neruda 163) (“within a few days [he] was one with the Spanish poets” (Neruda, *Memoirs* 116)).

Neruda quickly established a life and literary career in Spain, working alongside García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Luis Cernuda, and other distinguished twentieth-century writers, but Neruda’s life began to change when the brutal and unremitting Spanish war began. An uprising in 1936 of the rebel Nationalist party led by General Francisco Franco initiated the war, and although their intention was to bring off an uncomplicated overthrow, the result was anything but; the Nationalists had been unprepared for the resistance of the elected Republican Party, and the rebellion quickly escalated into a full-fledged civil war. The war affected all of Spain, and “for the majority of the population - almost 25 million people - the outbreak of the war was first and foremost a horrible imposition of pain and suffering. No area of the country was spared” (Sánchez 56). The violent warfare between the two parties did not subside for three years, and all the while Spain suffered from both physical and emotional destruction: cities were ravaged and lives were destroyed as political dissension wedged deeper into the heart of

Spain. In April 1939, Franco and his party finally succeeded in their pursuit of power, and thus began Franco's 36-year dictatorship.

Censorship and Neruda's Response

During both the war and Franco's regime, the Nationalist Party used silence as a weapon, imposed upon their opposition during the war and the populace thereafter. In his autobiography *Confieso que he vivido: Memorias (Memoirs)*, published a year after his death in 1974, Neruda recounts: "[Y]la guerra de España, que cambió mi poesía, comenzó para mí con la desaparición de un poeta" (170) ("the Spanish war, which changed my poetry, began for me with a poet's disappearance" (*Memoirs* 122)). It began on the night that Federico García Lorca was assassinated. Like several of Neruda's friends and colleagues, Lorca was one of many who were punished for having beliefs and values that did not coincide with those of the Nationalist Party. On July 19, 1936, Neruda and Lorca had planned to meet for a wrestling match, but Lorca never arrived because, as Neruda states, "ya iba camino a su muerte" (170) ("he was at that hour already on his way to death..." (*Memoirs* 122)). Lorca had been a politically active writer who failed to comply with the censorship imposed by Franco's army, and as a result, he was arrested and shot by the Nationalist Party.

These extreme measures were taken under the pretense of defending the Nationalists' ideals. The regime showed minimal to no constraint in their efforts to maintain control over a weak and fragile Spain; Franco and his party used every resource they had to destabilize any resistance to their movement, including the most drastic form of censorship: taking a life to keep the opposition silent. At this period in time, Spain was "unable to manage or afford a

unified cultural transformation, [so] the state fell back onto the limited tools of authoritarianism: import duties, limited aid to favored activities, and censorship" (Bowen 135). As a result, writers and artists were limited in what they could and could not say, as "everything published, displayed, broadcasted, staged, filmed, printed, or performed was subject to censorship" (Bowen 137). People were unable to speak freely or express their opinions, political or otherwise, and those who disobeyed, like Lorca, were subject to exile, imprisonment, or death. It was Lorca's death that crystallized for Neruda the fact that it was absolutely no longer safe to speak or express opinions freely and openly. The dangers of the war had become undeniable, on both a large-scale and personal level; the war was real and so were the effects it had on Neruda and his writing.

In the midst of the war, he published a collection of books called *España en el corazón* (*Spain in the Heart*) (1937), which contained the poem "Explico algunas cosas" ("I Explain Some Things"), a poem that clearly reflected a very different stance from his earlier pre-war days. In his autobiography, Neruda described the pain he felt with every death or disappearance of his friends and their words and thoughts; all were the unfortunate victims of Franco's violent censorship. In "Explico algunas cosas," Neruda calls out to his old friends, asking them if they remember how Spain used to be, and if they remember the joy before Franco:

Raúl, te acuerdas?
Te acuerdas, Rafael?
Federico, te acuerdas
debajo de la tierra
(Neruda 43-44).

Raúl, do you remember?
 Do you remember, Rafael?
 Federico, you remember,
 from under the earth
 (Eisner 63).

He calls out to friends, whom he later refers to as “hermanos” (brothers), who worked alongside him and helped him grow as a person and an author. As readers we know “[that] Federico (García Lorca), Raúl (González Tuñón), and Rafael (Alberti) [were] victims of the war, either dead or in exile, [which] contributes to our tacit acceptance of their silence” (Costa 95). Neruda knows this, and yet he deliberately calls out to them, asking them to recall the peace of their lives and the colorful liveliness of Madrid before the war; but they, of course, cannot answer. With their lives, their words were taken from them, rendering Neruda’s “hermanos” not just physically absent, but speechless. Neruda acknowledges their voicelessness, and instead of asking Federico, he tells him, “Federico, te acuerdas/debajo de la tierra” (“you remember, from under the earth”). Neruda calls attention to his friends’ absent voices, to their silence as a result of Franco’s punishments. He reclaims the lost words of his friends and chooses to use their silence as a positive lyrical construct, in spite of its previous role as a form of authoritarian punishment, in order to help him convey the injustices of the war. Neruda takes Franco’s enforced silence, his regime’s violent obstruction of verbal expression, and turns it on its head, using silence in his poetry to *resist* censorship and convey the trauma of the war and Franco’s control.

Omission of Description

An additional dimension of silence demonstrated in “Explico algunas cosas” can be seen through Neruda’s adoption of an indisputably more somber and more politically charged tone that mirrors his newfound political activism. This newly adopted, stronger, and more opinionated voice is paradoxically empowered through the use of silence, not words. Through this silence, used as a mechanism in translating the traumatic aftermath of Spain’s Civil War, the reader can recognize “Neruda’s growing poetic militancy [that] took form chiefly in a more outspoken, outreaching voice than he had needed before...” (“...” (Felstiner 114). The words Neruda uses serve as a framework to construct his newfound outspoken tone, which is ironically conveyed silently; the reader is able to interpret his blunt and forthright voice only through the silence surrounding his words rather than the words themselves. This tone, for example, is demonstrated when Neruda writes:

Generales
traidores:
mired mi casa muerta,
mirad España rota:
pero de cada casa muerta sale metal ardiendo
en vez de flores [...] (Neruda 45)

Traitor
generals:
behold my dead house,
behold Spain destroyed:
yet instead of flowers, from every dead house
burning metal flows (Eisner 65)

Any degree of detail to the descriptions of these sudden atrocities is lacking, but the urgency and anger of the poet’s voice is almost palpable, proving that Neruda has now silenced the

florid voice of his past to convey how he feels. The silence perceived in his minimalistic phrasing and the restraint of his words transmits a strong enough tone, or voice.

Another example of Neruda's obvious new tone is transmitted through the absence of words is when he writes:

[...] y por las calles la sangre de los niños
corría simplemente, como sangre de niños. (Neruda 45).

[...] and through the streets the blood of the children
ran simply, like children's blood. (Eisner 65).

He does not exaggerate or even describe the image by adding further account—or almost any account. Instead, he calls the children's blood simply "sangre de niños," which alone evokes distraught and horrified feelings within the reader. The word "simplemente" ("simply") suggests that any additional words would have minimized the impact of such a harsh image, and the less he describes, the more affectively and, therefore, effectively, the reader senses the poignancy in his voice used to transmit the gravity of the war. Although it is clear that Neruda uses words to create his poem, the *sparseness* of his tone and his utter restraint make clear that he has voluntarily chosen to omit detail in contrast to his former poetry, which took on a more loquacious, fluid verse. Therefore, I argue that the silence that comes from these restrictions empowers the poem, increasing its impact and deepening the readers' perception of what Neruda experienced and saw precisely through the lack of distracting or excessive words.

We can see further evidence of silence through Neruda's spare descriptions of what he experienced and saw during the war. As the title of the poem suggests, he wrote this poem "to

persuade the reader of the truth, the factuality of what [was] being narrated” (Costa 95), to convey the facts as purely as possible, instead of trying “to convince the reader of the sincerity of the sentiment expressed.” The words of the poem serve to convey the truth of the war, and I maintain that the reader feels the personal, emotional effect of the war on Neruda through silence. The poem still serves as a way to translate the war’s sheer horror and violence to his readers, and his paucity of words, or silence, as a powerful literary device, achieves this purpose.

Neruda starts off his poem by rhetorically addressing his own readers, questioning his poetry. “Preguntaréis” (“You will ask”), he writes, about what happened to the poems of flowers, rain, and love, and:

Preguntaréis por qué su poesía
no nos habla del suelo, de las hojas,
de los grandes volcanes de su país natal? (Neruda 45)

You will ask why his poetry
doesn’t speak to us of dreams, of the leaves,
of the great volcanoes of his native land? (Eisner 67)

Neruda understands that his audience wants to know what has happened to the poet he used to be. It is a question he could have addressed in a multitude of ways, but rather than providing lengthy answers to these pressing questions, he orders his readers to come and see the blood of children that covers Spain’s streets. He does not paint a vivid, eloquent picture of war, or offer detailed images of people dying; rather, he simply writes:

Venid a ver la sangre por las calles,
venid a ver
la sangre por las calles,
venid a ver la sangre
por las calles! (Neruda 45-46)

Come and see the blood in the streets,
come and see
the blood in the streets,
come and see the blood
in the streets! (Eisner 67)

Instead of describing to his audience what to see, he omits detailed images and repeatedly demands that they see and experience the horror for themselves. The repetitive command implies a shortage of acceptable words to portray trauma, and because the stated aim of this poem is for the reader to understand “a few things,” the role of silence is a deliberate choice, a device used to highlight the atrocities that words fail to convey or explain. The audience can comprehend the brutality of the war because Neruda’s refusal to use more words and descriptions allows silence to fill the void. Silence is not merely the absence of words or sound, but rather a transition “to a gaping open of unsaid possibilities” (Del Caro 142), which both empowers what has been said and allows the reader the opportunity to interpret.

Silence in Structure

The verse structure of Neruda’s poem is yet another element that empowers this idea of silence as a valuable literary device deepening the audience’s comprehension of the war and its effect on Neruda. The physical structure of the poem provides spaces where the audience can literally see the lack of description, and these gaps foreground areas where silence takes the place of words to enhance the reader’s interpretation of the war. Similar to the poem used in my introduction, “Schweigen” (“Silence”) written by Eugen Gomringer in 1954, the construction of the poem lends itself to silent spaces that are more powerful than the surrounding words.

Felstiner explains that, “at the end, Neruda shapes his imperatives with line breaks that show a stronger, simpler touch with both his subject and his audience than anything he had written before” (118). The simple pauses after each line are pregnant with meaning and deepen the impact of the tragedies and unbelievable moments Neruda faced.

In contrast to the short, staccato sentences used in Elie Wiesel’s *Night* as a dimension of silence (further discussed in Chapter Three), Neruda reconstructs the conventional arrangement of sentences within texts, which creates visual gaps in the poem. Likewise, instead of adhering to the traditional spacing of lines, Neruda varies the spacing, which affects where his audience pauses while reading. This literal void characterizes silence drawing attention to the visual lack of language, to the space that silence creates, and I argue that Neruda’s intentional use of space represents silence as a way to convey trauma.

Chapter Two

The Master of Silence in Paul Celan's "Todesfuge"

As I have argued in Chapter One, traumatic events such as war or genocide are often not readily translatable through words and may be better conveyed through the non-verbal. Words can serve as a framework for the vast space of non-verbal understandings of such events, but it is what is left unspoken that may have more impact. Instead of considering silence as an absence, viewing its existence as a corollary to words proves more fruitful than the words themselves. I will argue here that Paul Celan's "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue") uses silence constructively as a means to express the horrors of the Holocaust, in ways that both differ from and are parallel those seen in Neruda's poem. While silence is seen in both texts through the omission of detail, Celan's poem also demonstrates the use of silence through unsettling juxtapositions, which allow the reader to interpret thoughts that cannot be articulated as poignantly through specific words. Additionally, his use of repetition and the distant tone he employs contribute to the silence that expresses the hopelessness of each passing day in Auschwitz. Finally, the last dimension of silence is seen through the omission of the victims' voices, which I will argue serves as a way to maintain a form of power.

As Zoë Vania Waxman, Holocaust historian and senior research associate at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, states:

"Language may not be adequate to convey the horrors of the Holocaust, but this does not mean that nothing can be said, or that the events cannot be comprehended. It is certainly a difficulty faced by survivors who believe that it is the words they write which form a memorial not only for themselves but also for those who did not survive" (175)

Because the Holocaust was and remains a horrific historical event, words and language fail in their attempt to fully portray what happened. However, as Waxman explains, “this does not mean... that the events cannot be comprehended,” because our understanding runs deeper than words; although these experiences cannot be accurately portrayed with language, an understanding of the Holocaust exists in the absence of words. I will argue in this chapter that the depth of meaning behind Celan’s poem “Todesfuge” goes beyond what he writes; it cultivates a silence that ultimately better allows the reader to sense the Holocaust’s horrendous atrocities.

Paul Celan and His Poetry

Paul Antschel (changed to Celan after World War II) was born to Leo and Fritzi Antschel on November 23, 1920, in Czernowitz, a city in the then-Kingdom of Romania (now Ukraine). Celan’s parents stressed the importance of both a Jewish upbringing and the German language. Though Celan grew up speaking German at home, he became fluent in a number of other languages, including Romanian, Hebrew, and French. Celan’s father Leo was a strict man who “believed in the Jewish axiom that only the father who knows how to punish his son truly loves him” (Chalfen 37). His mother, on the other hand, showered him with her love and affection, and their close relationship was often reflected in Celan’s poetry.

Leo and Fritzi took pride in their son’s education and sent him to the best schools they could afford. Although at first he struggled in school, Celan’s grades improved with age when he was finally able to focus on the subjects he found more stimulating, such as literature and history. His teachers found that he often accomplished more than what had been required of

him: "Better-read than any of his schoolmates, he was always ahead of them" (Chalfen 37). It was around the age of sixteen that Celan started writing poetry; during his school years, he wrote expressive poetry, ranging from love letters to affectionate poems for and about his mother.

After spending a year in France when he was eighteen, Celan returned home to Czernowitz to study romance philology. As the Axis powers began to take over Eastern Europe and the War drew closer to his home, Celan began to express through his poetry the difficulties of this time in his life, frequently alluding to the surrounding destruction and death. In July of 1941, The SS Einsatzkommando 10B finally reached Czernowitz. Critic and translator John Felstiner describes this process:

Since Romania had meanwhile joined the Axis, its army and police aided the Germans in obliterating a six-hundred-year Jewish presence: burning the Great Synagogue; imposing the yellow badge; plundering, torturing, and slaughtering community leaders and three thousand others during the first twenty-four hours; driving Jews into a ghetto; and later deporting tens of thousands. (12)

Because Romania had joined forces with Germany, the Romanian government contributed to the atrocities committed against Jews in Czernowitz. During one of the deportations, Celan was able to elude capture. His parents, however, resigned themselves to their fate and awaited their deportation, oblivious to the inevitable torture that would accompany this decision; his father presumably died of typhus and his mother was shot as a result of her physical exhaustion. Celan himself was incarcerated in a Romanian labor camp until 1944.

Throughout the war and after it ended, Celan continued to express himself through his writing. He wrote poetry reflective of the unyielding pain and exhaustion he and his fellow prisoners experienced each day. Although Celan moved to Bucharest, Vienna, and ultimately to

Paris and had acquired fluency in multiple languages, he continued to express himself almost exclusively in German. In contrast to Elie Wiesel (the subject of my next chapter) who “deliberately [chose] a foreign language as his means for expression, Celan [insisted] that his poetry [could] have resonance and power, that it [could] only be successfully redemptive, only in German” (Hawkins 77). Celan states that he chose to write his poems in his native language because he believed that “only in the mother tongue can one speak one’s own truth. In a foreign tongue a poet lies” (qtd. in Garloff 132). Celan wanted his poetry to faithfully reflect his feelings and experiences, and he felt that to write in a language other than German would not do justice to the horrors experienced. Regardless, I will argue in this chapter that it is not the language itself that speaks the truth; rather, it is the silence that accompanies Celan’s native language that allows the reader to comprehend the magnitude of the Holocaust.

Due to his time in forced labor camps and the tragic brutal deaths of his family, Celan suffered from long-term depression. In the spring of 1970, Celan committed suicide by jumping off a bridge into the Seine River in Paris. Many of his fellow survivors saw his suicide as weakness, a submission to the Nazi’s so-called Final Solution. Waxman writes, “...Wiesel has stated that the suicides of Tadeusz Borowski, Joseph Wulf, Paul Celan, and Benno Werzber condemn society, for it carries out the task that the killers did not complete” (170). However, turning this interpretation on its head, it could also be said that Celan’s self-imposed death was the most extreme, albeit tragic, expression of his own personal agency; rather than society controlling his life (and death), Celan himself made the final decision to accept perpetual silence as better able to express him than language. His death, a permanent silence, resulted in ultimate freedom, which was chosen rather than imposed.

“Todesfuge” and Silence

Although much of Celan’s poetry was and remains powerful and inspiring Holocaust literature, the focus of this chapter is on his poem “Todesfuge” (“Death Fugue”), a rhythmic, almost musical poem with repetitive cadences describing a concentration camp. Within the poem, there are victims, who drink what Celan refers to as “schwarze Milch” (“black milk”) for every meal of the day, and throughout the day; a blue-eyed Nazi soldier yells at them, viciously instructing some of the prisoners to dance and sing for his entertainment while the others dig their own graves. Thought to be written in 1945, “Todesfuge” received recognition as an influential and exceptional narration of the Holocaust, drawing “more passionate attention than any other poem from the war” (Felstiner 26). However, because it was a poem about the Holocaust, and it was published so soon after World War II ended, some received the poem to be controversial. Theodor Adorno famously wrote in his book *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, (*Cultural Criticism and Society*) that “nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch” (“to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Grass 99)) in response to literature written after the Holocaust, which included Celan’s “Todesfuge.” Many authors, such as Günter Grass, have reinterpreted this statement as a challenge to write about Auschwitz without diminishing the horrific uniqueness of the Holocaust. In his book *Two States – One Nation*, Grass states, “my speech has to find its end, but there is no end to writing after Auschwitz, no such promise can be made – unless the human race gives up on itself completely” (123).

Although Paul Celan wrote after and about Auschwitz, I argue that the silence in his poem conveys the horror of the Holocaust more accurately than his words, and his poem does not diminish the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust. He does not fruitlessly attempt to

explain the trauma experienced; instead, he provides his readers with a tool with which to “hear” and experience his thoughts. That is, although writing about the Holocaust poses an inherent challenge according to Adorno, I maintain that in “Todesfuge,” the true horrors of Auschwitz emerge from the underlying silence within Celan’s poem, rather than the words of the poem. It is what he does *not* write in the poem, rather than what is explicitly stated, that enables the reader to apprehend the essence of Auschwitz.

Unsettling Juxtapositions

The first dimension of silence that I see demonstrated in “Todesfuge” relates to Celan’s use of unsettling juxtapositions. Throughout the poem, Celan never pointedly states that the subjects of the poem are suffering, although this is made clear through his use of contradictory metaphors. In contrast to Neruda, who refrains from the use of metaphors in his poem, Celan uses them to capture silence. However, through contradicting means, both Celan and Neruda avoid deliberately expressing the horrors of the wars; rather they let silence portray these atrocities. Celan uses metaphors to frame silence, and one example of this type of jarring collocation is the “schwarze Milch” (“black milk”) that the Jews drink everyday. Generally speaking, the word *milk* conjures up the image of a white, nourishing substance essential to human life. However, this milk is black and tainted and has been stripped of its ability to sustain life. Throughout the poem, the lyrical *we* in “Todesfuge” drink this black milk every day, and regardless of whether we should understand Celan in the literal mode when he writes that the “camp inmates were given a liquid they called ‘black milk’ (Felstiner³³), or whether it is a metaphor to signifying something that is “extreme, bittersweet, nullifying the nourishment vital

to humankind" (ibid, 33), the reader understands that it represents an impure and uniquely grotesque ritual forced upon the prisoners. Because Celan does not explain the metaphor, it is up to the reader to extrapolate from the silence within. As Del Caro states:

When we ascribe a particular calling or evocative potential to Celan's poems, we do so based not strictly on what the poet does not say, on what he leaves out of what he leaves unsaid but on the basis of what he does indeed say insofar as it *unsays* certain things in its saying, and insofar as its saying also points the way to a gaping open of unsaid possibilities (142).

In other words, the meaning of the poem "Todesfuge" is interpreted from the unsaid, and the words simply act as a vehicle carrying readers toward understanding this inevitable silence of the poem. Celan introduces the idea of black milk through his words; however, the reader sharpens the meaning of this motif through its unsaid explanation. The words themselves, "schwarze Milch," allow us to read into the silence of the text because they serve as a metaphorical framework for the reader's personal interpretation. Celan only gives the reader a metaphor, a grotesque combination of something pure, milk, with something symbolically evil, darkness, which serves as a verbal guide urging us to interpret the unutterable, horrific events forced upon the victims of the Holocaust. The implications of this perverse juxtaposition leave the reader to interpret the vague silence in order to perceive the horror of Auschwitz.

Another example of such a juxtaposition can be seen in the line "Ein Mann wohnt in Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt" ("A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes"), a scene in which the poem's Nazi interacts with his domesticated snake. Felstiner translates the German word "Schlangen" as the English word "vipers," which connotes a more malicious creature than the English "snake" and thereby further stresses the creature's venom. However, either way, in the context of "Todesfuge", the animal seems to be a clear

biblical allusion. In the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible, God commands Eve not to eat a fruit from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. However, the serpent in the Garden tricks her into eating the fruit:

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof.... (*King James Bible*, Genesis 3: 4-6)

When God asks Eve why she disobeyed him and took fruit from the forbidden tree, she tells Him that the snake beguiled her. As a result, God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden and punishes the snake by creating antagonism between the snake and humanity: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (ibid. Genesis 3:15). According to the Bible, it is a consequence of the snake’s trickery that humans can see and understand the evils of the world.

In “Todesfuge,” Celan alludes to the Bible’s explanation of man’s understanding of evil by depicting a relationship between the antagonist of the poem and his snakes. As with the black milk, Celan takes an idea of domesticity and comfort and transforms it into something shocking and hideous. The word “home” customarily ignites feelings of relief and ease; however, a home full of vipers has the opposite effect. Celan couples the idea of a home with something cruel and inhumane, and this juxtaposition transforms a natural comfort into something disturbing and unsettling. The Nazi in “Todesfuge” has an abnormal reaction to his home filled with vipers; Celan writes that he “plays with his vipers” instead of recoiling from them, implying he not only accepts their presence, but welcomes and enjoys it. He “lives in the

house” and “plays with his vipers” in his home, befriending them and welcoming these sinful creatures into his home.

It can be inferred from what Celan does *not* state that the Nazi guard not only embraces hatred, but that he nurtures it, constantly tending to it; so depraved is he that he actually enjoys taking part in the destruction of humanity. Because Celan does not offer excessive detail and instead uses a perverse juxtaposition and almost childlike language, he forces the reader to extrapolate from the silence that follows his words. This metaphor lends itself to a vast space of unarticulated ideas from which the reader can interpret the depth of the man’s evil.

Repetition

Another dimension of silence that I find in Celan’s “Todesfuge” can be seen in the repetition of key terms and motifs throughout the poem. This repetition evokes a specific manifestation of silence in that it represents a deeper, ongoing idea running beneath the surface of the single, repeated word or phrase. Metaphorically, the repeated words throughout the poem are the tip of an iceberg, a metonym, and underneath the words written lies a larger unseen (or in this case of silence, unheard) aspect that underscores the underlying meaning of the poem. Jean-François Lyotard compares the impact of silence to that of an immeasurable earthquake: “The impossibility of quantitatively measuring [a huge earthquake] does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force. The scholar claims to know nothing about it, but the common person has a complex feeling, the one aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate” (56). In other words, if an earthquake destroys any tools used to measure its force, it is understood that the magnitude of

the earthquake is more powerful than the ability to measure it, rather than non-existent. The same logic applies to the power of silence through repetition; the reader comprehends the horror of the Holocaust *because* there are so few words to convey the atrocities experienced and committed. Celan's repeated use of the same words, motifs, and phrases does not diminish the unique horror of the Holocaust; rather it reinforces it.

We can see the immeasurable magnitude of the Holocaust when Celan uses repetition to describe the laborious and monotonous daily ritual in Auschwitz. He repeats the phrase "wir trinken" ("we drink") throughout the poem, which makes the reader feel the suffocating monotony with which days languidly drag on, as they start and finish the same way, by drinking the same grotesque and tainted black milk:

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink

Although the only image Celan portrays *in writing* is that of a group of people drinking black milk all day, the reader is able to sense and understand the deeper, coexisting pain each day brings. Because Celan constantly reiterates the idea of drinking and drinking, it can be understood that the drinking was disagreeable; it was forced upon the subjects of the poem. The reader comprehends such torture through the endless and unpunctuated mundane practice of drinking black milk. Instead of characterizing the effect of the Holocaust by adding words or emotions, or opting for synonyms, Celan chooses a select group of words to repeat over and over, and this repetition and disregard for substitute phrases empowers the

significance of silence as a means to represent trauma. The reader understands that every day means suffering for the Jews, and this conclusion comes from what Celan does not tell us, rather from the implications of no positive outlook for each day. Each day starts and ends with the black milk. The lack of more precise words, or simply *more* words, to convey horror pounds like a drum with each repeated phrase, and this reiterates its colossal and horrific impact of the Holocaust.

Omission of Detail

A final dimension to Celan's silence can be seen in his omission of detail. Throughout the poem, Celan refrains from using nuanced descriptions to recount the experiences at Auschwitz and withholds the voices of the prisoners. His omission of detail and sound can be read as an expression of silence because it allows the reader to interpret the absence of words. Because Celan does not impose adjectives or descriptions of the Holocaust, from this void the reader supplies his or her own unlimited possibilities to comprehend and contextualize the horrors implied throughout the poem. We can see Celan's lack of detail when he writes:

er pfeift seine Rüden herbei
er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde

he whistles his hounds to come close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground

Celan uses the word "pfeift" ("whistles") to indicate the German's summoning of both his hounds and the Jews. The word itself implies more than just the sound the Nazi makes; firstly, the reader recognizes the position of power the antagonist of this poem possesses over the Jews. Secondly, it is understood that in the Nazi worldview, Jews equate to dogs and are viewed

as subhuman. Because “pfeift” is used to control the Jews and force them into action, the reader knows that the actions of one man can determine the fate of thousands of prisoners. Furthermore, because Celan compares the man whistling to *his* Jews with him whistling to *his* dogs, he expresses the insignificance of Jews; they are worth less than other humans and can be summoned like dogs. What the reader gleans from the poem is deeper than the superficial portrayal of the Holocaust; the reader understands the inhumane status of the Jews and the deterioration of hope among them, and it is only through Celan’s lack of detail that the reader comes to identify the obvious process of dehumanization at Auschwitz.

The omission of detail can also be seen through the lack of violence in Celan’s descriptions. As is also the case in Elie Wiesel’s memoir *Night*, which I address in detail in my next chapter, death is mentioned in Celan’s poem, but there is no violence. Both of these literary works allude to brutal and horrific death; however, they lack any comprehensive *description* of death. Nevertheless, the reader understands this implicit violence through this absence of words and what the silence of words implies. An example of this absence of violence appears when Celan writes:

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
 er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
 dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng

He shouts play death more sweetly Death is a master from Deutschland
 he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then in smoke to the sky
 you'll have a grave then in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped

Because the descriptions are scarce, the reader gathers the magnitude of each death and how Celan suggests that the horrific nature in which the Holocaust victims died is unable to be represented through detailed text. To describe death, Celan writes simply, “Tod ist ein Meister

aus Deutschland" ("Death is a master from Deutschland"). Interestingly, in Felstiner's English translation, the word for Germany is kept in the original language. I interpret this adherence to German in the English translation as a way to emphasize the weight and undercurrent implied in the word Deutschland, which connotes death and Nazism. Beth Hawkins agrees: "Only the mother tongue can render the truth of the Jewish European experience. And, as Theo Buck's title *Muttersprache, Mördersprache* (Mother-tongue, Murder-tongue) suggests, "Muttersprache' is, and must remain, inextricably connected with 'Mördersprache' for Celan" (77), plausibly because in this instance Celan is describing death, an English translation for the word Germany would lose the weight of the origin of death; the depth of understanding this death can only derive from the mother-tongue, German.

Celan only describes death as a master from Deutschland, and this simple yet powerful comparison helps the reader evaluate the horrors of death at Auschwitz. From Deutschland came the blue-eyed master who orders his prisoners to play music for him and promises them a grave in the sky: "er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft" ("he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then in smoke to the sky"). Deutschland reflects the agony and torture inflicted on the prisoners, and this synecdoche representative of death is apparent through Celan's simple comparison, devoid of detailed descriptions of death or Deutschland. This deliberate omission of detail is one of the many dimensions of silence. The word *Deutschland* provokes unstated connotations, one of which is the horrific and unspeakable tragedies of Auschwitz. Death, not from Germany but from Deutschland, serves metonymically as a stand-in for the Nazi Party, and although Celan did not verbally articulate the brutality of Nazi Germany, we read into the absence of details and are thereby forced to

surmise in order to understand.

Omission of Voice

Lastly, the reader can also interpret the victims' lack of voice as an omission of sound. Their silence serves as evidence of their will. Although they are being forced to dig their own graves, to dance for entertainment, and endure endless torture, they remain silent, which I argue is their way to maintain their only remaining power over the blue-eyed master from Deutschland.

The voicelessness of the victims can be seen in the uses of verbs to describe both the prisoners and the Nazi guard. The verbs describing sound or words correlate not with the victims, but with the soldier; he calls out, he orders the victims to play, and he writes. In contrast, the prisoners drink, dig, and play, but they never speak, cry out, or argue. Parallel to the lack of description, the absence of voice conveys the power of silence because by remaining silent, the victims are ironically expressing more to the reader. Their silence demonstrates their last remaining power of the Nazis; they *choose* to remain quiet in the face of abuse and ridicule, which reveals their resilience in the face of torture and their strength through silence.

Gerhart Baumann argues that Celan's poems typically depicted the silence of a language as a way to find a balance between excessive speech and absence of sound. He states, "Celan war stets bestrebt, der Sprache das Schweigen zu bewahren in der Erkenntnis, das eine Sprache ohne Schweigen zur Sprachlosigkeit, zu Redseligkeit verurteilt ist" (19) ("Celan always strived to preserve the silence of speech in the knowledge that a language without silence is condemned to speechlessness, to loquacity" (Del Caro 141). Words without silence either say too little, or

say too much; silence serves as a corollary in finding the balance to properly convey a message. In "Todesfuge," Baumann's argument is demonstrated in the power of silence from the prisoners. I maintain that they remain quiet not because they are frightened or forced into silence, but because it is their effort to preserve their dignity: their voice. In conjunction with Baumann's argument, their silence prevents them from over-speaking while maintaining the importance of language; their silence speaks louder than their words would have. However, by rejecting speech, they are allowing their silence to symbolize their strength and power in the face of cruelty. In relation to Celan's use of silence overall, the voicelessness of the poem's subjects empowers their status, just as Celan's use of multidimensional silence enhances his portrayal of the Holocaust.

Chapter Three

Silence as Power to Contest the Silence of Apathy in Elie Wiesel's *Night*

The ways in which Elie Wiesel uses silence are sometimes different from those of Pablo Neruda and Paul Celan. Firstly, he comments upon the silence of God and of the world as a result of the Holocaust. He explains his desperation and exasperation with the world and wonders how it could have remained silent in the face of such tragedy. In addition, he illustrates the silences used by the prisoners and victims of the Holocaust. Often times, prisoners remained silent, parallel to the prisoner's in Celan's poem, to preserve the last bit of power over themselves and maintain a glimmer of hope for freedom. Lastly, Wiesel uses silence in a way that is similar to that of Pablo Neruda: he uses repetition, scarce details, and line breaks to allow what is not said to dominate his writing.

Elie Wiesel and The Holocaust

Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel, a Romanian-born Jew, was a young boy during the Second World War and a victim of the Holocaust. He grew up the third child and only son in a well-esteemed family in the city of Sighet. As a child, Wiesel had a deep interest in his Jewish faith, praying often and seeking mentorship in the study of the Jewish Kabbalah, and at the age of thirteen he found spiritual guidance from a poor, local townsman. It was through this man's experience that Wiesel and everyone in Sighet first came to hear about the concentration camps; his religious mentor had been sent to the camps in July of 1941 along with other foreign Jews and mercifully survived. When he returned to Sighet toward the end of 1942, he tried to convey

to Wiesel and all the neighbors the horrors that awaited Jews, but to no avail (Wiesel 7). It was not until almost the end of the war that people began to comprehend the urgency of his panic when the town was viciously taken over by the German Army in the spring of 1944. Although the Germans seemed pleasant at first, after Passover “the curtain finally rose... [and] from that moment on, everything happened very quickly. The race toward death had begun” (Wiesel 10).

First, the Germans made decrees and created laws that Jews were forced to obey. Then, after Passover, they created ghettos and uprooted families from their homes in order to gather all the Jews into designated areas. Even as late as April of 1944 many still denied the horrors of what was to come and thought they would simply stay in the ghettos till the end of the war; as Wiesel writes, “the ghetto was ruled by neither German nor Jew; it was ruled by delusion” (Wiesel 12). Then began the transports. In May of 1944, Wiesel and his family were shipped off to endure three different concentration camps under the rule of the National Socialist German Workers’ (Nazi) Party.

Because Germany began to lose quickly to the Allies, the countries that opposed Germany and the Axis Powers, the Nazi Party expedited their imprisonment and systematic slaughter of Jews. Many camps were turned into extermination camps where people were sent and killed upon arrival. Auschwitz-Birkenau, part of the large network of camps connected to Auschwitz, was one such camp, and during this time, it was known as the major site for the Nazis’ Final Solution.

When the Germans exported the Jews from Sighet, Romania, in 1944, Wiesel and his father were separated from the rest of their family and first placed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were then sorted into the Auschwitz concentration camp for three weeks and later transferred

to the subcamp Buna where they worked in an electrical shop for months. Because the war was coming to an end, the Soviet Union and Great Britain had started liberating many campsites. In order to elude the Allies, the Nazi party forced prisoners to migrate to alternative camps. In January of 1945, Wiesel and his father were forced to march in the harsh winter conditions to the Buchenwald concentration camp located near Weimar, Germany. On April 11, 1945, the United States liberated Buchenwald, only a few weeks after Wiesel's father died from brutal beatings, exhaustion, starvation, and dysentery.

Writing The Holocaust

In 1954, Wiesel wrote *Un di Velt Hot Geshivgn (And the World Remained Silent)*, an 865-page memoir about his time in the camps. His memoir was originally written and published in Yiddish, but with the help of French novelist François Mauriac, the French publishing company Les Editions de Minuit, managed by Jérôme Lindon, managed and published the memoir's first French translation, titled *La Nuit* (1958). This translation, along with subsequent translations, was fewer than 200 pages. Wiesel explains he "accepte[d] [Lindon's] decision [to edit and cut the French version] because [he] worried that some things might be superfluous. Substance alone mattered. [He] was more afraid of having said too much than too little" (x).

Wiesel's first English translation, by Stella Rodway of MacGibbon and Kee in London, was published by Hill & Wang in 1960 and was titled *Night*. However, in 2006, Wiesel published a second English translation, this one done by his wife, Marion Wiesel. This new translation was scrutinized and questioned, as people wondered why Wiesel chose to retranslate his English memoir and focus on particular facts changed from the original English version. For instance,

English professor and Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow at Cornell University Daniel R. Schwarz, in his book *Imagining the Holocaust*, questioned the different ages stated in the two versions: “Is not this age discrepancy one reason why we ought to think of *Night* as a novel as well as a memoir?” (qtd. in Wyatt). In addition, Naomi Seidman, Koret Professor of Jewish Studies at the Graduate Theological Union, addresses discrepancies between the original Yiddish, its French translation *La Nuit*, and the newest English translation in her book *Faithful Renderings*. Although she disagrees with Schwarz’s claim (234), she recognizes the stark difference of detail between Wiesel’s original and the subsequent translations (220). In response to such questions and criticisms, Wiesel introduces the new version with an explanatory preface, in which he justifies his choice in requesting a second English translation: unlike Celan, he found it almost impossible to write in his mother tongue about his experiences at Auschwitz, and thus the writer said he could only imagine what was lost when his story was translated into a foreign language. He wanted his wife to translate a more accurate English version of the original because, according to Wiesel, when the original English version was published, “[he] was an unknown writer who was just getting started,” and although he felt the first translation “seemed all right,” he felt his wife could transmit his voice “better than anyone else” (xiii).

In the preface, to give his readers some clarity, Wiesel addresses the challenges he faced when trying to describe his experience translating his time at Auschwitz into words: although he felt language to be a barrier, he still felt compelled to break what he felt had hitherto been the indifferent silence of the world. Ironically, in doing so, he uses silence as a form of power, stating: “And yet, having lived through this experience, one could not keep silent no matter

how difficult, if not impossible it was to speak. And so I persevered. And trusted the silence that envelops and transcends words” (x). Wiesel was able to take on the challenge of writing about the Holocaust, an event that “transcends words,” because he allowed to the silence from the Holocaust to aid him in his writing instead of causing him to shy away from it. Silence enhances the portrayal and retelling of his life during the Holocaust and the horrors he witnessed and endured. Instead of allowing the only silence to be that of an apathetic world response, he utilizes its power to “forge new modes of thought and art” to understand the Holocaust (Sibelman 31) and to assume the responsibility of educating the world.

The World Remained Silent

Wiesel references throughout the memoir a devastating sense of abandonment that came as a result of the world’s ignorance or indifference to the Holocaust. He recognizes its overwhelming power to suppress and smother the dignity and hope of the victims, and he describes how the world responded to the horror and atrocities of the Holocaust with deep, penetrating silence that rendered prisoners hopeless and helpless: “I told [my father] that I could not believe that human beings were being burned in our times; the world would never tolerate such crimes.../ ‘The world? The world is not interested in us. Today, everything is possible, even the crematoria...’” (Wiesel 33). Wiesel expresses his disbelief at the world’s silent apathy and abandonment in the face of such evil because a silent world signified something far more appalling than ignorance: it signified rejection.

This silence created a sense of desperation; the world had turned its back on the victims’ suffering while Nazi soldiers fed off their fear and anguish. When describing his first day

at the camp, Wiesel reflects on the arrival of a Nazi soldier and the presence of death that accompanies him: “Suddenly the silence became more oppressive. An SS officer had come in and, with him, the smell of the Angel of Death” (38). The overwhelming rejection and pain becomes more apparent and magnified in the presence of the Nazi; his arrival deepens Wiesel’s sense of complete desolation. The officer in this scenario does not have to say anything, for the prisoners to feel death encroaching. The Angel of Death, a biblical reference, alludes to the destroyer of people who are not righteous, and in this moment, Wiesel identifies the Nazis and this demon as one and the same. The Nazi brings death with him because he individually has complete control over the Jews; he has power to claim the lives of Jews for, as he believes, the unrighteous crime of living. In response, the world *chose* to be silent.

When silence becomes a choice, not just the result of ignorance, it carries moral weight. At the time Wiesel came to Auschwitz in the spring of 1944, the world knew of the horrors committed, yet waited for the problem to solve itself. Wiesel reflects on his loss of faith in humanity and God due to this oppressive silent response. He reflects on the overwhelming despair that greeted him after only one night:

[...] Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes [...]. (34)

From the first day in Auschwitz, Wiesel felt robbed of everything for which he lived, even his faith in God and humanity. He identifies the source as a “nocturnal silence,” a void that is not sound, but not quite the absence of sound, which is awake when others are sleeping, waiting to instill doubt, bitterness, and resignation. This silence that stemmed from abandonment and

hatred imprints a mark on Wiesel deeper than any cut, darker than any bruise, and more lasting than any words.

Silence as power and hope for freedom

In contrast to the world's callous silence, the silence seen in Wiesel's memoir symbolizes hope and power among the victims and forces the world to recognize the horrors of the Holocaust. Seidman argues that "the question of how [Wiesel could] hope to break through the world's apathy by writing [...] is one [he] never raises in *Un di velt* nor explicitly answers anywhere else" (223). However, the silence used in his memoir, though not an explicit answer, is a response to the indifference of the world during this time. Wiesel reappropriates the definition and use of silence, as he illustrates in his memoir how it can be used as a positive tool to combat the apathy and to express the power and choice among the prisoners in the camps.

Firstly, he describes a young French woman with whom he worked in the camp who both used silence as power herself and also encouraged Wiesel to do the same in the face of enemies. She and Wiesel worked at the Buna labor camp adjacent to Auschwitz; although the French woman was employed there, she was not a prisoner like Wiesel. They never spoke because to his understanding, she did not speak German and he did not speak French. One day, however, after receiving a severe and unwarranted beating from the his unit commander, the French woman imparted some wisdom to him in "perfect German": "Bite your lips, little brother... Don't cry. Keep your anger, your hate, for another day, for later. The day will come but not now... Wait. Clench your teeth and wait..." (53). She told Wiesel to withhold emotions from the enemy in order to maintain a sense of personal control. Though his feelings were

valid, expressing them to his torturers would not only provoke them to beat or murder him; it would relinquish the one thing he could control: his reaction. Therefore Wiesel took the woman's advice and allowed his silence to empower, not degrade, him. By remaining quiet, Wiesel did not give the Nazis the satisfaction of knowing they had beaten him; instead, he used it as a way to maintain his dignity and self-worth in a desperate and impossible situation.

Not only did the French woman explain the advantages of choosing to remain silent, she practiced using silence herself to ensure her hopes of freedom. Up until their only verbal encounter, Wiesel did not know the woman spoke the German language. Years later, after the camp's liberation, he ran into her by sheer coincidence on the Metro in Paris, and she told him that she purposefully had not spoken German in order to protect herself from imprisonment. She was a Jew, but due to her pale complexion, she had been able to pass as Aryan, and her knowledge of German would have exposed her secret. She had kept silent for years, using her secret to maintain hope that the Nazis would not catch her; her silence was her only hope for freedom.

Another example of the power of silence can be seen in Wiesel's description of a scene in which Nazi soldiers accused prisoners of participating in an alleged electrical sabotage. As a result, those apprehended were tortured and sentenced to hang:

The *Oberkapo*¹ was arrested on the spot. He was tortured for weeks on end, in vain. He gave no names. He was transferred to Auschwitz. And never heard from again.

But his young *pipel*² remained behind, in solitary confinement. He too was tortured, but he too remained silent. The SS then condemned him to death... (Wiesel 64)

¹ A prisoner assigned by the SS to oversee other prisoners

² A young male child who receives special privileges or favors due to his relationship with

² A young male child who receives special privileges or favors due to his relationship with an authority prisoner.

Both the *Oberkapo* and his *pipel* accepted their punishments of death instead of giving in to torture and betraying their co-conspirators. The *Oberkapo* endured weeks of violence, which Wiesel elects not to describe in detail, but the reader can clearly interpret his choice as one of self-sacrifice in the name of saving others. His life is completely at the mercy of the Nazis, but he has one thing left: power over his own voice.

The young boy also chooses to remain quiet in the face of abuse and suffering. Like the *Oberkapo* his silence represents not just power, but resilience; even with torture, the two would not yield. Simon Sibelman states: “Silence represents an invisible, inner strength, a source inspired, creative energy at whose core stands God” (9) and this source of strength is evident in their final moments. Their silence was their choice, their one way to wield power over their oppressors.

Omission of description

In addition to the world’s ignorant silence and the silence among the prisoners to maintain power, Wiesel himself exhibits his own powerful silence, which is seen in the way he chooses to omit description in order to illustrate the horrors of his initial arrival to Auschwitz. We see more evidence of this omission in the recent English edition than in the original Yiddish edition. In the preface of the new translation, Wiesel recognizes the need to for some passages “to remain between the lines” (*xi*) and that he accepted cuts in order to avoid unnecessary descriptions. In comparing the two texts below, we see the strength of silence through the spare and restrained descriptions of the English in contrast to the verbose and superfluous

descriptions in the Yiddish (loosely translated into English by Professor Nick Block). After being torn from his home, shipped off like an animal, and stripped and robbed of all possessions, including his own name, Wiesel and his fellow prisoners suffer through hours of senseless beatings and incessant waiting. Finally, they are marched out of Auschwitz-Birkenau and towards their new reality:

It was a beautiful day in May. The fragrances of spring were in the air. The sun was setting.

But no sooner had we taken a few more steps than we saw the barbed wire of another camp. This one had an iron gate with the overhead inscription: ARBEIT MACHT FREI. Work makes you free.

Auschwitz. (Wiesel, *Night* 40)

It was a snowy April day. A spring aroma was in the air. The sun held a short pose before it started to go westward. A romantic sunset. And never was the sun as warm as it was on that day. And never was the sky so far from us as it was on that day. [There was no God in heaven and there was no man on earth. The creation – split in two: into Angels of Death and into corpses.

Dusk. The eternal battle between day and night, between light and shadows. This time the night won without any effort. Another few minutes went by and my eye caught the electric fences. A camp. A new camp. And this iron gate. An inscription was written on it: Arbeit macht frei!

The camp stands it is said under the sign of irony. Auschwitz. (Wiesel, *Un di velt hot geshvign* 83-84)

Here Wiesel uses blunt, straightforward sentences and words in both the original Yiddish version and the second edition English translation to illustrate their arrival at a place that marked the death of millions. In both, he starts off with simple comments about the spring weather, but through a closer analysis of the text, the reader can decipher the irony of prisoners marching into a concentration camp on a beautiful spring day. One can almost see a bright, blue sky, feel a cool breeze complimenting the warm sun, and smell sweet flowers blossoming. Although the original text is more descriptive than the English translation, in

neither version does Wiesel make a direct comparison in order for the reader to perceive the stark contrast and comprehend the irony: the world glowed while thousands of famished, exhausted prisoners marched to their deaths. Interestingly, in the original, Wiesel articulates with words the abandonment he felt from the world and from God: “there was no God in heaven,” and although the verbal articulation of his feelings is not translated directly into English, the same message is conveyed in this translation through the implicit silence of the text. It is understood that this comforting day actually serves to underscore how blind the world and God were to the suffering and anguish of Holocaust victims. The silence of what is not written conveys the tragedy of what is to come.

Wiesel starts a new paragraph stating, “But no sooner had we taken a few more steps than we saw the barbed wire of another camp” (40). This sudden ominous image foreshadows the hatred and tragedy that awaits the prisoners. In both the original and the translation, he leaves a break to set apart the description of the world and his march towards the new camp. However, the translation has a more abrupt interruption, which stresses the happiness and loveliness of a world from which the Nazis have wrenched Wiesel. The line break allows for the reader to pause and anticipate what will be written next. In a textual parallel to how he was torn suddenly from the comfort of his home and family, Wiesel rips his readers away from pleasantries and submerges them darkness: the silence after his description of the day shatters the hope for freedom and brings the audience back to the inevitable darkness and hopelessness that await.

Furthermore, in his second paragraph, Wiesel simply quotes the infamous words that marked the entrance to Auschwitz: *Arbeit macht frei* (Work makes (you) free). In neither the

translation nor the original does he describe the way it made him feel nor the weight of the notorious Nazi slogan. Instead, he uses silence to speak for him. In his article "If God Was Silent," John K. Roth describes the many meanings of silence and one meaning, in particular, that is found in Wiesel's writing:

[Silence] may signify, with special intensity and emotion, that even when one speaks, it is still possible to be speechless, for one may not know what to say or cannot find words that are appropriate, meaningful, and credible in relation to what is present, remembered, or yet to be faced. (140)

There are no words needed to convey the hateful implications of *Arbeit macht frei*, and superfluous descriptions cannot accurately reflect its meaning. Instead, silence captures everything that Wiesel does not write with words; the reader can feel the dread and an overwhelming sense of panic just reading the words of the chilling Nazi slogan.

In the English edition, the last sentence he writes is merely one word: Auschwitz. The weight of the word reverberates through the silence that follows, and it is clear to the reader that Auschwitz stands for so much more than a place; it represents the loss of hope and dignity and replaces any happiness with despair and anguish. The Yiddish version states explicitly the irony of the slogan, that freedom here means death; however, I argue that this description is superfluous and degenerative of the memoir's tone. The irony, which Wiesel refers to in the Yiddish version (the camp stands, it is said, under the sign of irony), is implicit in the silence surrounding the word Auschwitz, and further explanation, as seen in the original, constrains the power of silence. The stillness as an aftermath "is not merely the absence of something else, ... but rather is an adjunct to speech and sound" (Sibelman 11); without silence, we could not understand the power of the words. The hush that encompasses the word in the translation supports and aids the deep, horrific meaning of the word, the place, and the idea of Auschwitz.

Another prime example of how Wiesel forgoes details, thus empowering silence, is demonstrated through his lack of violent descriptions in the English edition. In contrast to the original Yiddish version of the text, the English translation omits a large amount of violence. Below we read one example of the English translation's omission of violence in contrast to the original seen in Wiesel's description of the train to Buchenwald:

One day when we had come to a stop, a worker took a piece of bread out of his bag and threw it in the wagon. There was a stampede. Dozens of starving men fought desperately over a few crumbs. The worker watched the spectacle with great interest. (Wiesel, *Night* 100)

Then our train stopped next to a German city. A worker threw in a piece of bread into the wagon. Maybe out of pity. But that's difficult to believe. Anyway – the piece of bread landed. And caused the death of some tens of people. The battle for bread! The struggle for life!

In the train car where the bread fell, a stampede broke out, a type of underwater tumble, a war. The wildest instincts from the ancient prehistoric jungle all of a sudden ruled us all. With the strength of a blinded ox everyone threw themselves to the bread that fell. People were beating with their fists right and left, crawling over corpses, kicking the sick, and they were tearing dry faces with their nails. All of this for a miniscule piece of bread. It was a bit like manna falling from heaven. It's a shame that the bible doesn't tell us how the Jews picked up the first manna. If they were beating each other. Whether there were wounded people or whether people died like the scene that was playing out before us.

The German workers were still standing there and were looking in at the amusing spectacle and also at the same time potentially soothing their conscience as if they were doing a good deed as if they were giving out charity bread to the hungry. It didn't take long before all the workers did what their soft-hearted comrade did. And pieces of bread started falling in all the wagons. Bread and victims. (Wiesel, *Un di velt hot geshvign* 209-210)

Wiesel starts off by writing, "One day when we had come to a stop, a worker took a piece of bread out of his bag and threw it in the wagon" (100). As readers, we understand the malice implied in the seemingly neutral or even kind act of giving. Contradictorily, in the Yiddish version, Wiesel interjects his own interpretation of the worker's intentions: "Then our train

stopped next to a German city. A worker threw in a piece of bread into the wagon. Maybe out of pity. But that's difficult to believe" (209). I maintain that the English version better depicts the superiority and ridicule expressed by the onlookers than the Yiddish version due to its omission to detail and conjecture. The silence that takes the place of the original's superfluous detail is more powerful, better highlighting the cruelty of the German workers who "help" the prisoners by tossing scraps of bread into the confined train car. A casual worker threw one simple piece of bread to a large group of starving and abused humans and "watched the spectacle with great interest" (stated both in the English translation and the original), insinuating that this worker purposefully instigated a fight for his own entertainment. Although Wiesel speculates on the intentions of the workers in the Yiddish version, the English translation allows the readers to come to this understanding through the use of silence instead of explicit or direct commentary. Wiesel addresses these differences between the original and the translation in his preface, acknowledging that his original Yiddish version may have been loquacious. I concur and argue that the English translation, through its pared-down detail, allows silence to enhance and empower the text where words prove unsatisfactory.

Finally, I must address the disparity between the Yiddish original and the English translation in regard to Wiesel's description of violence. The English edition does not use words to describe the death and violence of the Holocaust, but the reader still knows they exist because they are implied in what is *not* said. Sibelman agrees: "[a] striking feature [in *Night*] is the absolute lack of gruesome detail, or even the mention of death" (38). However, that is not to say the memoir lacks violence because "for the reader, these elements exist, but only in the metasilence that Wiesel imposes" (Sibelman 38). The English translation of *Night* uses silence to

create a framework, which is not the absence of sound, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary; rather, it says what cannot be written in language.

An example of how silence in the English version conveyed violence more effectively than the descriptive violence of the original is seen in the prisoners' reaction to bread. The violence, or "stampede," for the bread that ensued from its landing in the train car is not described, yet the reader visualizes the barbaric and almost animalistic state to which these starving men have been reduced: "dozens of starving men fought desperately over a few crumbs." In the Yiddish edition, Wiesel writes a more descriptive version of the stampede: "In the train car where the bread fell, a stampede broke out, a type of underwater tumble, a war. The wildest instincts from the ancient prehistoric jungle all of a sudden ruled us all," and although this version provides more graphic images, I argue that these descriptions are unnecessary, actually detracting from the brutality of the episode. Wiesel does not need to paint a textual portrait of the blood and beatings; he merely needs to provide his readers with the fundamental sense, the gut instinct, for them to comprehend the gravity of this situation, all of which is demonstrated in the English translation. Men, starving enough that they would fight over a piece of bread, desperate enough they would spare what little energy they had to fight, weakened enough that they have lost their regard for other beings. This knowledge is clear not because Wiesel writes it, but because the silence describes the scene for him.

Lastly, Wiesel's use of short, staccato sentences in both the original and the newly translated English edition also serves as a dimension of silence. The sharpness of the short, simple phrases creates violent breaks in the flow of the text and punctuates each horrific event or understanding of Auschwitz. From the passage stated above, the reader can identify

instances of such punctuation in both the translation's and the original's depiction of the Auschwitz camp:

This one had an iron gate with the overhead inscription: ARBEIT MACHT FREI. Work makes you free. (Wiesel, *Night* 40)

A camp. A new camp. And this iron gate. An inscription was written on it: Arbeit macht frei! (Wiesel, *Un di velt hot geshvign* 83-84)

The punctuation and stylistically short sentence structure acts as a form of silence in that it expresses the impending doom felt during the Holocaust. It brings the reader halting and stumbling through the memoir, stopped by quick bursts of violent breaks. Instead of providing specific details of the situation, Wiesel uses short, spare sentences that punctuate the unsaid violent undertones to deliver a more powerful image of the hate and cruelty the victims experienced. Despite the argument that "emotions are conventionally assumed to be what it is most difficult to express in language" (Cronin 85), Wiesel's expression of his emotion in response to the Holocaust is clearly demonstrated through the omission of overt descriptions and expressive sentences in favor of the sound of silence.

Chapter Four

A Response to Censorship: Silence in Víctor Érice's *El espíritu de la colmena*

According to Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, in his essay “La miseria y el esplendor de la traducción,” “¡... la efectividad del hablar no es solo decir, manifestar, sino que, al mismo tiempo, es inexorablemente renunciar a decir, callar, silenciar!” (443) (The effectiveness of language lies not only in speaking and discussing, but also inevitably in refusing to speak, remaining quiet, silencing!). In other words, the language one speaks is a result not only of the words one says, but also of what one silences. Ortega y Gasset’s argument can be applied to my analysis of the film *El espíritu de la colmena* directed by Víctor Érice (1973) due to the multidimensional silence prevalent within the film, used to convey the grief and sorrows that accompany the Spanish Civil War and life under General Francisco Franco. In this last chapter, I explore a different medium for silence: in contrast to the preceding chapters, here I introduce an example of an audiovisual text that uses silence as a metonym to convey trauma. Silence in Érice’s film can be seen through the lack of dialogue among characters, the varying forms of censorship, the nonverbal sounds, and the colorless landscape and scenery of the film. The manifestations of silence and renunciation of language in the film communicate what speaking cannot: the otherwise ineffable critique of Spain under Franco.

Víctor Érice and *El Espíritu de la colmena*

Víctor Érice was born in Madrid on June 30, 1940, one year after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Though he studied political science, economics, and law at the University of Madrid,

he began working as a movie director after getting a degree in film direction. In October of 1973, he released his first directed movie, *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*), in Madrid. One of the most acclaimed films of Spanish cinema, *El espíritu de la colmena* “turns to [the myths] of horror film to caricature [Spain] as Frankenstein, a monster that has lost its memory” (Higgenbotham 116).

El espíritu de la colmena tells the story of a disconnected and uncommunicative family living in a remote village in Castile shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War. The film focuses on the youngest daughter, Ana, how the interactions within her family influence her fascination with the 1931 movie *Frankenstein*, and the effect the movie has on her relationships. Her older sister, Isabel, is her closest companion and the person whom she often approaches when she has questions. Isabel, however, often deceives Ana and fabricates stories, encouraging her belief in monsters and spirits. Their mother, Teresa, is lonely and nostalgic for her past. She is often absent in the lives of her children and is shown writing to a man, presumably someone beloved from her past. It is not until the end of the movie that she capitulates to traditional duties as a mother and wife. Fernando, the father and patriarch of the family, spends most of his time tending to the bees he keeps and describing their behavior. Though his presence in the lives of his children is more pronounced than that of Teresa's, his relationship with them appears distant and formal.

The film opens with James Whale's adaptation of *Frankenstein* (1931) being screened for the townspeople. The audience is composed of primarily children, including Ana and her sister Isabel, and the movie serves as the rudimentary foundation for Ana's incessant curiosity about monsters, a recurring motif that manifests differently throughout the film. Her sister,

taking advantage of Ana's gullibility, convinces Ana that the monster from *Frankenstein* lives in an abandoned sheepfold in the middle of a vacant field, which Ana routinely visits, hoping to catch a glimpse of him.

The arrival of an anonymous and presumably Republican fugitive soldier marks the climax of the movie. He arrives by train at night and seeks refuge in the abandoned sheepfold. As I argue below, the soldier's soundless presence and aura of mystery leads both Ana and the audience to associate him with the *Frankenstein* monster or as a type of spirit. Regardless, Ana develops a fleeting but close, albeit silent, relationship with the soldier, caring for him by giving him her father's clothes and personal belongings, including a pocket watch. However, the fugitive soldier is discovered by the Nationalists and killed; his perpetrators identify the soldier's clothes as Fernando's, which inevitably makes Ana's father aware of her secret friendship. When Ana finds out about her friend's death, she runs away. At the end of the movie, Ana is found and taken home to recover. The final scene shows her sitting at her window with closed eyes, calling out to the monster, inviting him back into her life.

The Silence of the Characters

The most apparent dimension of silence seen in this movie is the characters' lack of conversation. Throughout the film, the family members seldom interact verbally with one another, and when they do, their conversations are occasionally incomprehensible. As Dr. Xon de Ros, University Lecturer in Modern Spanish Literature at the University of Oxford, points out in her article "Innocence Lost: Sound and Silence in *El espíritu de la colmena*" (1999), "not only are the dialogues scarce and laconic but there are also instances of loss of intelligibility either

by lack of voice definition as in the whispered dialogues between the two sisters, or by a proliferation of voices as in the opening sequence where a group of children break into excited uproar at the arrival of the travelling cinema” (33).

The silence of the characters is significant in that it reflects the power of silence as Franco’s weapon; the characters symbolize the imposed silence that Franco used to keep his opposition powerless and voiceless. Furthermore, the voiceless characters demonstrate Franco’s regime as a degenerate force resulting in the isolation and emotional destruction of Spain. Under Franco, people were unable to speak freely, and this suppression is mirrored in the voicelessness of the *Érice*’s characters. We find this evidenced in the relationship of the parents, Teresa and Fernando. They hardly speak throughout the entire film, and what is more, they are never shot communicating with each other, even when they are in the same room. The mother dedicates most of her time to writing to a man in a French political refugee camp, and the father spends his time analyzing his bees and their lives in relation to his own. Their choice to write rather than voice their opinions reflects the magnitude of Franco’s censorship; words are thought but never voiced, thus they remain unheard. Teresa and Fernando’s opinions remain inner monologues only for them to hear, reflective of the imposed silence of post-war Spain. Additionally, their slow, passive actions further demonstrate their sense of entrapment: the mother writing or bicycling almost aimlessly around the town, Fernando tending to his beehive and writing about the bees’ activity. Lancaster University Professor Mercedes Camino states in her article “War, Wounds and Women” that they “display an eloquent silence and aloofness in their deliberately slow and controlled movements” (95), and this absence of voice and life within the characters demonstrates the loss of hope of the time.

Parallel to the *human* characters' silence, we see further evidence of this voicelessness in Frankenstein's mute creation and its potential symbolic manifestation as arguably any of the following characters: Ana's father, mother, or the clandestine fugitive soldier. First, it can be argued that the recurring motif of the silent monster represents the remaining political resistance in Spain, those against the Nationalist Party. Similar to the resistance force, the monster in the film is silenced just as the characters that symbolize the monster suffer from imposed silence. Writer and scholar Dominique Russell states, "in a sense the Franco regime itself engendered monsters by de-humanizing its enemies, forcing them to exist in the silence outside the publicly acceptable" (183). In Érice's film, the literal introduction of a monster through the film *Frankenstein* serves as a motif, seen in the characters who exhibit characteristics previously or currently resistant to Franco's rule. Fernando, unlike Teresa and the soldier, has succumbed to the imposed ideals of Francoist Spain; he accepts his role as the patriarch and although his life parallels the monotonous and relentless drone of the bees, he neither openly nor clandestinely opposes Franco's leadership.

Teresa, on the other hand, though nearly always silent, uses letters as an effort to make contact with the outside world. She rarely talks to her family and appears in very few scenes with other people; throughout the entirety of the movie, she never speaks to either her eldest daughter or her husband, and there is only one scene in which she speaks to Ana. Her lack of familial involvement can be read as a refusal to conform to social feminine norms. However, with the burning of her letter to a loved one, even she succumbs to the strict order of Franco's rule (Deleyto 50). As Camino states, "The content of the letter, stressing the shattering human loss and the atrocities undergone, indicates lack of hope, as well as vanished love" (95). Teresa

is consciously and purposefully destroying her chances to make contact with a world outside of Franco; she censors herself and her actions, not only submitting herself to a silent marriage but also succumbing to the imposed silence of Franco's regime.

Lastly, the Leftist soldier also embodies many characteristics of the monster. He is nameless, voiceless, and foreign. Unlike Fernando and Teresa, he never conforms, and as a result, he is killed. A parallel can be drawn between the silence of each character and their submission to societal norms; those who speak in the film speak as a result of their acceptance to Franco's regime, whilst those who remain silent also remain steadfastly opposed to Franco. The outcasts, cast as monsters, are both silent and silenced, as there is no room for opposition under Franco.

The silence within the film critiques life under Franco. Not only do the characters mimic the imposed censorship of his regime, they also use silence as a means to demonstrate the sadness and emptiness of the time. Towards the end of the film comes the only scene that shows the entire family together. They are seen eating a meal around the kitchen table, however the audience never sees all characters in the frame, and none of the family members utter any words for the entire duration of their meal (Deleyto 43). Instead, the film focuses on one person at a time, and although each is completely silent, their facial expressions and actions speak louder than any words. The audience sees Ana, who had been playing with her soup and silently laughing with her sister, become rigid and almost scared in response to the sound of her father's watch. Although the only sound comes from the pocket watch, the audience can imagine the unspoken conversation between Ana and Fernando. Her father does not need language to communicate the death of the soldier to Ana nor to indicate his

knowledge of her interactions with the fugitive, as the mere fact that he is once more in possession of the pocket watch makes this patently clear. Ana and Fernando silently communicate with not only themselves, but also silently converse with the viewers; *our* viewing of Ana realizing the significance of the pocket watch takes the communication one level further, all without language. Furthermore, Ana's silence also conveys to the viewers the grief and inner conflict that she experiences, feelings that demonstrate her growth as a character as such comes to realize the brutality of the world in which she lives.

The Destruction of Words and Censorship

Another facet of silence demonstrated throughout the film is that of a more literal censorship, seen both in the symbolic destruction of words and the intentional way the film is cut. Due to the extensive censorship of any literature, film, or other public displays of opinion under Franco's regime, social critique through any media had to be oblique and indirect. Therefore, Érice reflected this oppression of words in two ways. Firstly, he showed his own film's viewers a clip of the censored version of *Frankenstein* that characters view, allowing him to exploit symbolic parallels between the film and Spanish society. Additionally, Érice himself omitted any direct or explicit reference to the horror of Franco's regime and the brutality of the war and instead used silence to convey these references.

The audience immediately experiences censorship as a practice within the film at the beginning, when Ana and Isabel are watching the 1931 version of *Frankenstein*. Because the audience is watching an edited film within a film, they are both personally affected *by* and witnesses *to* censorship under Franco. The film within Érice's film shows a scene in which a

young girl encounters Frankenstein's creation and teaches him how to play with her pretty flowers. Suddenly, the video jumps a few scenes ahead to the girl's father, carrying her dead body. This scene cut from *Frankenstein* within the film exemplifies censorship that existed during the time of the movie and in the 1970s, when the movie *El espíritu de la colmena* was released. Neither the characters within Érice's film nor the modern-day viewership of *El espíritu* see the scene cut from *Frankenstein*, which implies longevity in Franco's censorship. Because *Frankenstein* was censored from both the modern day viewer and the viewers within his film, Érice insinuates that from the moment Franco became dictator (the year *El espíritu de la colmena* takes place), to the years leading up to his death (around the year of the film's release), cinema was edited and cropped in order to control what was being said throughout Spain. Furthermore, the "absent scene opens the way for mystery and ambiguity" (Russell 186), and the audiences, referring to both the audience within the movie and the viewers of *El espíritu de la colmena*, are left to infer what took place between those scenes and why. This gap therefore creates a void, a silent opening to fill, and creates opportunities for interpretation.

One possible interpretation is that the regime censored the (*Frankenstein*) movie in order to quash any ambiguity regarding the interpretation of good and evil. Franco's regime intended to create a discernible dichotomy between the Nationalist party and any opposing or otherwise threatening resistance, the latter symbolically conveyed via the post-edit actions of the monster: due to the edit, it appears as though he kills an innocent girl because he is evil. However, the scene omitted would have shown the kindly intentions of the monster: after the monster and the girl had run out of flowers, it wanted to continue their game and ultimately

drowned the young girl in its efforts to play with her. Because Frankenstein's creation was not human, it did not understand the consequences of treating the young girl like a flower. The edit of the scene can be interpreted as an effort to clearly demarcate the binary of good and evil; however, this purposeful edit inadvertently raises questions about the intentions of the monster, which consequentially results in creating a silent space of ambiguity. Despite the purposeful edit, which imposes a concrete distinguishability between the good versus evil binary, Ana still questions the monster's intentions, asking her sister to explain why the monster killed the young girl in the film. The audience witnesses Ana's curiosity surrounding the monster's actions, and in turn sees that there is a gray area, something between good and evil. This binary of good versus evil is evoked throughout the film, manifesting in the appearance of the clandestine soldier later in the movie. However, it is only because a key scene is cut from the *Frankenstein* movie that Ana starts raising questions, and in turn so do the viewers. The regime's censorship turns on itself and actually empowers both audiences, highlighting the void and plot jump and thereby opening a silent space in which to question what is good and what is evil in the world.

Finally, Érice's own self-imposed silence is exemplified in the introduction of the film's setting. The beginning of the film subtitles the words "Érase una vez" (Once upon a time) and "En un lugar de la meseta castellana hacia 1940" (somewhere in the Castilian plateau around 1940). These two introductory phrases, which allude to the classic fairytale opening and to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), respectively, immediately create a sense of both universality and ambiguity surrounding the setting of the film. This opening reflects the twofold use of silence: firstly, it demonstrates the censorship during this time period through the reference to

the unnamed Castilian village, which aids in evoking an “overwhelming sense of immobility that permeates all the scenes [of the film]” (Camino 92). The “sense of immobility” within the film derives from the universality of Spain’s bleak reality; because Franco’s censorship affects the entirety of Spain, everywhere remains fixed under his regime, unable to escape. Secondly, silence of the vague opening is used to self-censor, thereby wielding silence as a means to circumvent Franco’s censors. Robert Miles, Professor at University of Hull, argues that the use of silence and ambiguity in reference to Spain is a way “to get around the censor under Franco by pretending to disavow the socio-cultural specificity of the subsequent narrative” (159). The omission of the village’s name reflects the use of silence as a means to subvert Franco’s imposed censorship without the use of direct, verbal criticism; the enforced silence of his regime prohibited language against Franco, which, as a result, ironically empowered self-imposed silence as a means of resistance.

Nonverbal Sounds to Frame Silence

In addition to silence seen through lack of conversation and censorship, a third dimension is manifested in the use of nonverbal sounds in the movie. The sounds of Fernando’s footsteps and the train that runs through the town communicate a sense of foreboding and authority that accompanies Franco’s rise to power. The viewers comprehend the fear that surrounded Spain during this time through the nonverbal noises, as they exemplify the sense of impending doom more so than words. Furthermore, the sounds rather than words, frame the negative silence of Franco’s regime. Both of these nonverbal sounds provide the viewers the ability to sense impending danger, as the sounds themselves are drawn out and are

contextually framed as something to fear, which arguably reflects Spain's feelings in response to Franco's dictatorship.

We first hear the sound of footsteps at the beginning of the film when Fernando is looking around his empty house for his wife and children. Although he occasionally calls out their names in an effort to find them, the sharp sound of his feet marching through the house command the scene. His footsteps echo throughout, symbolizing his dominating presence in his search for his family; Fernando does not have to speak to establish power over his family. His ominous stride draws attention to the lack of other sounds because even without the use of words, Fernando makes his presence known, and the sound of his threatening steps insinuates the negative consequences of not submitting to his authority. Similarly, we hear his footsteps in the scene in which Isabel and Ana are secretly playing shadow puppets late in the evening; they reverberate through the house, becoming increasingly louder as get closer to the sisters' room. Upon hearing the portentous footsteps, Isabel quickly blows out the candle, fearfully whispering to Ana that their father is coming soon. The steady march of their father equates to the advancing control of Franco's regime and the threat of danger to Spain. The girls quickly stop speaking at the sound of their fathers' footsteps, symbolic of the inability to speak freely under the imposing censorship of Franco.

In addition to Fernando's footsteps, the sound of the train symbolizes the overpowering threat of censorship and imposed silence. Arguably the most prominent scene in which we hear the train is when Ana and Isabel are lying perilously close to the train tracks, their ears on the tracks, listening for sounds of an incoming train. After a few seconds, the sisters and the viewers hear the coming of the train. The train's whistle and course over the tracks soon

becomes increasingly louder, building up momentum and the threat of danger. Isabel runs away quickly; however, it is not until Isabel yells her sister's name loudly that Ana, too, runs to safety. Parallel to Fernando's footsteps, the train symbolizes Franco's regime as a destructive, unstoppable force, fatal to the opposition. Ana, as demonstrated in her friendship of the fugitive, Republican soldier, does not yet understand the danger of challenging Franco's regime; she is only safe from fatal consequences by virtue of her family, as they have recognized and succumbed to their bleak reality. Throughout the entire scene, Ana and Isabel do not verbally communicate, with the exception of Isabel's warning to her sister; they are silent, absorbed in the impeding and unstoppable train, that is life under Franco. Additionally, Teresa experiences the imposed silence symbolized by the train demonstrated in the scene in which she mails her letter at the train station. As the train slowly leaves the station, Teresa looks silently at the men in the carriages, yet she does not and cannot speak to them. The train, representative of censorship, literally acts as a barrier between Teresa and the men, who arguably serve as a reminder of her past and emphasize her inability to exist as she did before; she cannot speak freely, just as she cannot openly communicate with her beloved soldier or the men on the train due to censorship, yet she cannot escape. Instead, she tacitly stands by and silently watches as the train leaves her behind.

The Reflection of Silence through Colors and Landscape

The last dimension of silence is seen through the use of bland colors and the stark, dreary landscape. The village where the characters live is almost exclusively beige, a dismal, muted color. This can be interpreted as a visual reflection of the imposed silence of the time

period. De Ros argues, "... the landscape will reveal itself as a place of inscriptions, testifying to a silent piling up of thoughts, feelings and memories which defy words but still demand recognition" (36). The empty and nearly lifeless landscape reflects an absence of opinions, words, and ideas. Literally, the town itself lacks the hustle and bustle of a city: there are very few posters or signs to be read, and there are hardly any people wandering the streets. The voice of the town is wanting. Figuratively, the landscape is void of loud colors. Instead, it appears to be an endless grayish-beige, reflective of the monotony and uniformity of the characters' lives.

This colorlessness echoes the grief and loss of the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. The same loss of city life is seen in Pablo Neruda's poem "Explico algunas cosas," which I note in Chapter One. Neruda describes the full, rich lifestyle of Madrid before the war and then violently transitions to a city full of pain and horror yet devoid of lively human interaction as a result of Franco and his regime. In contrast to Neruda's violent images, *El espíritu de la colmena* reflects the overwhelming grief by showing its audience the raw absence of life. Camino argues, "the sense of grief pervading these images applies both to the immediacy of the defeat and to the awareness that this moment was merely the onset of a relentless repression that was to last four decades" (94). Because the war had recently ended, its resulting damage coupled with the country's financial destruction created an overwhelming sense of despair and hopelessness. The people of Spain were forced to accept Franco's regime, thus relinquishing their voices and yielding to life void of sound, which the audience sees as reflective of Spain's desolate situation.

Conclusion

As I have shown throughout my chapters, silence in literature and film is multidimensional and manifested in divergent ways. Although all of the texts explored in my chapters the use of silence to portray a traumatic event, they manifest such use of silence in various ways. I will now address the ways in which they weave together, ultimately creating the cohesive collection of texts on which I founded my argument.

In Pablo Neruda's poem "Explico algunas cosas" I explored the ways in which silence was expressed through omission of detail, somber tonality, and the literal visual construction of verses. Like Neruda, both Elie Wiesel and Paul Celan display a lack of detail, which connotes silence, in their texts *Night* and "Todesfuge," respectively. However, silence seen in the verse structure of the poem is unique to Neruda's text in the context of my thesis. Additionally, Neruda's text stands apart from the other texts analyzed due to the time it was written. In contrast to the other authors and the director discussed, who wrote and directed after the traumatic events reflected in their texts, Neruda wrote his poem in 1936, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. This proximity to the war in relation to the elapsed time between Víctor Érice's film *El espíritu de la colmena* and the war highlights the longevity of Francisco Franco's regime.

As stated above, Celan and Wiesel demonstrate similar dimensions of silence throughout their texts. Nevertheless, both authors also exhibit particular dimensions of silence. In my chapter on *Night*, I explored, in addition to the omission of description, the power of silence demonstrated by select characters, the short, concise sentences used both in the

Yiddish original and the English translation, and the English translation's lack of violence. Furthermore, the preface to Wiesel's text explicitly poses the issue of translation, not only across languages but also in the translation of thoughts and emotions resulting from trauma and horror into verbal language to begin with. This raises the question of saying too much or not saying enough when expressing trauma, and therefore serves as a base for my argument: translation of trauma through the positive use of silence provides a unique representation of such horrific atrocities.

Echoing the characters highlighted in Wiesel's memoir, the prisoners of the Holocaust represented in Celan's poem "Todesfuge" symbolize the use of silence as a way to maintain their one and only form of power. Although they follow the orders of the blue-eyed Nazi, they withhold their voice, and do not allow the soldier to take that from them as well as their pride and lives. Furthermore, we see silence in Celan's text through his aforementioned lack of detail, and repetition. In contrast to the other authors addressed in my thesis, we see an additional manifestation of silence in Celan's use of unsettling juxtapositions; his grotesque re-appropriations of something nurturing into something horrid and inhuman demonstrate a unique dimension of silence in response to trauma.

The last example of a text using silence is Érice's film *El espíritu de la colmena*. Although it was the only film in my selection, the uses of silence seen in the movie correspond as neatly as those of the written works. The dimensions of silence I addressed were the bleak landscape shown, the lack of dialogue between the characters, censorship, and the symbolic ways in which characters destroy words and language. Furthermore, the lack of discussion among the characters can be compared to the silence of the prisoners in both Celan's and Wiesel's texts.

Conversely, the way in which I argue the silence of the characters within the film represents a submission to censorship in contrast to the silence of the prisoners seen in the texts, used as a way to maintain power and hope for freedom. In addition, the film stands apart from my other examples in its temporal distance from the event it critiques. That is to say, where the texts were written and published less than twenty years after the Spanish Civil War and the Holocaust, *El espíritu de la colmena* came out thirty-seven years after the end of the Spanish Civil War.

In conclusion, the multiple dimensions of silence examined and analyzed in each of these texts create a strong argument for my case: silence can be effectively used to translate and express trauma; it empowers, strengthens, and enhances the readers' (or viewers') understanding of horrific events. Rather than a lack or an absence of sound, silence is seen as an artistic choice, one whose presence often speaks louder than words.

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